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ROAD BUILDING

Detailed studies of local road building systems in 100 counties are now being carried on by the department of agriculture in co-operation with the state highway departments and local road authorities.

The purpose of this study is to discover the points of excellence and defects in existing local methods of building and maintaining roads which will aid the state authorities to put local road management on a systematized basis. The co-operating state authorities have been asked to designate counties that present typical and exceptional features as to topography, character of road materials, methods of construction and maintenance, administrative organization, methods of road financing and traffic conditions. From these lists 100 counties will be selected, and in these counties the division of road economics will make intensive studies.

This investigation is prompted by the fact that there is at present very little knowledge as to the most effective and economical methods by which a county can develop its roads. At present the methods of financing local road improvements vary from



Rolling a Road Surface.

calling on farmers for a certain number of days labor in lieu of a road tax, or the use of county prisoners in road construction, to bond issues or maintenance of roads from dramshop license funds.

The department will study all of these systems with the view to determining what system or combination of systems works best in actual practice.

There is, however, at present no standard system of keeping accounts for road building and maintenance, and as a result, while some counties know to a penny the purpose for which money was spent, others have no definite check or reporting system. Among various counties with the same conditions, cost for excavation or other labor is anything but uniform, and many counties, because of the absence of definite knowledge, fail to use local and cheap materials and construct roads which are unnecessarily expensive for their purpose, or which will wear out before the bond issues are redeemed. The investigation will include a careful study of the use of convict labor in road construction.

In connection with the scientific study, the department's highway engineers will advise freely with local officials as to improvements, and thus give each county visited the advantage of direct co-operation, engineering supervision and assistance.

These investigations, it is believed, will yield important economic data bearing especially on the benefits and burdens of road improvement and showing the extent to which financial outlay under given typical conditions is justifiable.

The heads of state highway departments are manifesting great interest and are co-operating cordially in this work. These data when obtained will be published and thus made accessible to all county and state road officials.

The Sum and Substance

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